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Congress of the United States
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COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
AND INFRASTRUCTURE

COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND
COOPERATION IN EUROPE (U.S.
HELSINKI COMMISSION)

February 21, 2023

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

I write to request a review of federal spending linked to caring for victims of Johnson & Johnson's (J&J's) contaminated talcum powder, often referred to as baby powder. For decades, J&J sold baby powder that was known to be contaminated with asbestos, a known carcinogen. Hundreds of thousands--more likely millions--of men and women are now suffering from ovarian cancer and mesothelioma as a result. Through our funding for health care, the federal government subsidized J&J by paying for the consequences of their misconduct. I want to know how many taxpayer dollars were spent for this corporate subsidy.

Since the 1970s, J&J has known its iconic baby powder contained asbestos. The company that mined the talc informed J&J of the contamination. The company also knew for decades that the fibers in talc can cause cancer. Yet, J&J continued to sell the baby powder, specifically marketed this dangerous product to women of color and "overweight" women.

Of course, it will be difficult to precisely capture the full costs, considering, new cases of ovarian cancer and mesothelioma arise every day. However, I believe it is critical that GAO develop a methodology to accurately estimate the cost of J&J's misconduct to federal taxpayers. How much was spent by the Departments of Defense, Veterans Affairs, Justice, and Health and Human Services to provide direct health care and medical treatments to those who regularly used J&J's talc-based powder and have been diagnosed with ovarian cancer or mesothelioma since 1972?

These deadly and debilitating conditions were entirely avoidable. Taxpayers have a right to know the public price of this corporate malfeasance. If you have any questions, please contact Jared Feldman, Senior Counsel, in my office at jared.feldman@mail.house.gov. Thank you for attention to this serious matter.

As always, I remain,

Most sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Steve Cohen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Steve Cohen
Member of Congress